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RANGOON FOR PATRICK MURPHY

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM LT

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON FOREIGN MINISTER'S SHOOTING INCIDENT - THE PLOT THICKENS

REF: A) MASERU 124 B) MASERU 089 C) MASERU 85 D) MASERU 59 E) MASERU 51

¶1. Foreign Minister Moleleki who is also editor-in-chief of the ruling party newspaper Mololi, has reacted to rumors which have surfaced regarding his enigmatic "assassination attempt." In his weekly editorial column on March 23, Moleleki clarifies that the woman he went to see after leaving the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) annual party conference on January 29, 2006, the day he was shot, was in fact his wife and not a mistress as some members of the public have alleged. Moleleki reiterated his conviction that he was shot by members of his own party. (Note: Moleleki made these claims publicly on February 4 during an interview by a private radio station MoAfrica and also in a press statement he released on February 07). However, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Marketing, Mpho Malie who is also the Secretary General of the party, stated that the attack was not politically motivated, but a criminal act by thugs.

¶2. Moleleki indicated that on the last night of the afore-mentioned party conference, there were certain factions within the LCD, which had prior knowledge of the plot to assassinate him. He thanked God for saving his life. He claimed he had learned that some people have been planning to kill him for well over eight years. Moleleki added that Phakiso Molise, a former policeman who is serving fifteen (15) years for high treason was one of the who wanted to kill him for issues involving a certain woman whom Moleleki claims he does not even know.

¶3. Eight days after the shooting, the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also Minister for Home Affairs and Public Safety, made a statement in parliament, in which he assured members that the state had sufficient resources to investigate Moleleki's assassination attempt. However, two and half months after the shooting, according to the local press, the police have not announced any significant developments in their investigations.

¶4. An editorial on the "Moleleki Riddle" in the April 14 issue of The Public Eye (Lesotho's largest English language newspaper) raised more questions. The newspaper asks why police have no suspects despite the assurance by the Deputy Prime Minister, why they cannot confirm whether Moleleki's bodyguards had returned fire or not, and why there were no bullet cartridges found at the scene of the crime after several rounds of automatic rifles were fired. The editorial alleged that Moleleki has been giving the police few details about the incident and this has fueled rumors that the Minister is hiding the truth. Rumors, which have been circulating around Maseru, allege that Moleleki and his bodyguards staged the "assassination attempt" outside his residence after he was attacked at the home of his mistress. The rumors further claim that Moleleki's wound was consistent with a knife attack, not a gun shot.

¶5. Comment: The lack of any official statement by the government

is puzzling to the members of the public. The contradictory statements by the Malie and Moleleki regarding the shooting incident has exacerbated the confusion. Another burning issue which should be explained is the failure by the police to confirm whether Moleleki's bodyguards returned fire or not. All these have generated a lot of speculation to the extent that the general public can see that something is fishy and wants answers. The latest information by the police is that investigations are continuing. There has been no observable unrest as a result of the incident and the GOL has stated its intent to maintain public security.

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